

Mother tongue, tied

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Mr Modi has come straight from the Wuhan summit with the Chinese President, where he no doubt spoke in his mother tongue when he convinced the premiere to concentrate on *dhokla* rather than Doklam. Emboldened by his persuasive faculties, he came to Karnataka and straightway challenged the pitiable Rahul Gandhi to speak in his mother's mother tongue for 15 minutes, that too without looking at a paper. This is a fair challenge because the PM, a polymath, would have then understood Gandhi's crisp Italian and gone back to reread Dante, Lampedusa and Calvino in the original; readings he missed when he was busy memorialising Savarkar's superhuman exploits about begging mercy from the British government. Poor Gandhi, born to a Kashmiri father and a Tuscan mother must be having a tough time living up to this challenge; for Mr Modi is a prickly kind. Mr Modi can take this prick further because Gandhi's grandfather, a Kashmiri Pandit and as per Mr Modi's rightful assumption, a trifling leader of the dynastic Congress, spoke in his mother tongue on that midnight in 1947. For greater public good, that bumbling speech was later translated by Mr Biplab Deb, who was weightlifting with Samudragupta's pen drive when he got a call to do the honours. Mr Deb promptly consulted — in his mother tongue — his mentors in ancient worldwide web and came up with the famous phrase *tryst with destiny*. Unless translated with Vedic zeal by the foot soldiers of nationalism, India would never have known the heft of this phrase. This was especially precise after 2014, when, barring the 30 per cent who buttoned the EVM to their likeness, the rest of us would have been in the dark about *that* tryst and *that* destiny forever.

Dare you call Mr Modi himself a runaway speech-bride! He has a soft spot earmarked on radio, where like Churchill, he gives dollops of heartfelt instruction to warriors on how to reappear for exams after their papers are leaked. Mr Modi had learnt it the hard way in Nagpur and wants the country's young to emulate his strive and determination. He has also said that in his fledgling years, he meticulously listened to *Rabindra Sangeet* on AIR sharp at 5:30 am; just after he had finished watering his cows. But that treacherous All-India Radio, another dinosaur from that illiberal Nehru era, has claimed that radio sessions began only at 5.50 am and those tuneless Tagore songs were played, if at all, only at 7.45 in the morning. These dour egotistic *babus* fail to realise that Mr Modi listened to radio strictly in his mother tongue — a fact Tagore himself has confirmed. These *babus* have no right to contest the claim, that too in English. They should be hauled into the Gangetic open and reminded one final time — in their mother tongues — that there was no English when Vedic paratroopers helicoptered their way from the Central Asian Steppes to the Indian heartland. Period!

But Mr Modi is an honourable man. He will not do any such thing. He believes in dialogue and dialectics. He believes in them so much that when he finds no one worthy of his great wisdom, he cosies up to his wax doppelgängers between historic deals and momentous proclamations about secularism and brotherhood. In his unguarded moment, Mr Modi has also confessed that his wax alter-egos understand him best, in his mother tongue of course, because he can talk at length without being asked fraudulent, Nehruvian questions. Surely, we, the hoi polloi would barely understand the loneliness and burden of being India's first prime minister in 70 years, as per the unerring Google. That is precisely why he never speaks from the pulpit of a glassed podium and makes it a point to mingle with people on the ground. He is so grounded that he even writes his name, in his mother tongue — on his jacket — lest he, in the din of his *kaamdar* convictions, forget even that! And who has not seen Mr Modi in umpteen TV appearances when he has spoken at length, no doubt in his mother tongue, in one-to-one conversations with senior, unpaid journalists.

It is only because of these interviews that India has risen way above the rest in press-freedom index; for he, as India's first prime minister, has insisted that media freedom is a pillar of democracy. In fact, when Mr

Modi talks about freedom, democracy, judiciary, parliamentary politics and especially the Constitution, the teary-eyed paragon of the common man is uncompromising in his use of his mother tongue, so that all of us can have a clear comprehension of what he means and what he means not.

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